

M. 230,698
 S. 377,132

OCT 12 1965

Congress uneasy about its role in Vietnam

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Star-Ledger Washington Bureau

A bipartisan groundswell of dissatisfaction — a feeling of being frozen out of White House decisions relating to the Vietnam war — is sweeping through Congress. It's a feeling of uneasiness rather than direct criticism of President Johnson's actions. But many lawmakers believe the burgeoning Vietnam war is a one-man show with congressional participation limited largely to occasional White House briefings of key leaders.

Sen. Wayne Morse (D-Ore.) flatly attributes the Vietnam struggle to decade-old blunders by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Agency for International Development, both under control of the executive branch.

Many view the Vietnam situation in terms of a gradual erosion of congressional powers to declare war, paralleling the unilateral action of former President Harry Truman who termed the costly, bloody Korean war a "police action," fought by U.S. troops under the United Nations flag.



Mowery

BACKGROUND

and provided them with money without maintaining controls over their policies and programs."

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Citing the autonomy given the CIA and AID operations, he said:

"This is most notably true in the case of the CIA and AID programs. Both spend hundreds of millions abroad each year; both employ thousands. Both make foreign policy and expect Congress to finance it with no question asked. To its discredit, Congress has done so.

"We have felt ourselves incompetent to ask the question. We lack the staff to oversee the work of these thousands of people, and we have failed to demand that Congress be informed of their activities and operations."

The free-wheeling CIA and AID Morse said, are responsible for the Vietnam war.

"The war in Vietnam," he observed, "is the direct result of decisions and policies made 10 years ago by the Central Intelligence agency and the AID agency. Ten years later, 125,000 troops and the Strategic Air Command have been sent to bail them out of their mistaken decisions and policies, and we do not know yet how it can be accomplished.

"Yet, we are doing it on the equally false assumption that once committed by these unknown persons, operating largely in secret, the entire country must fall in behind them."

White House action, other critics recall, led to actual mobilization in the Cuba crisis in the face of an A-war threat by the Soviet Union.

None disputes the gravity of the Vietnam situation which could ignite all Southeast Asia.

By year's end, more than 150,000 Americans will be fighting in Vietnam, plus elements of the seventh Fleet and B-52 bomber crews based on Guam. This is war! Morse declared:

"Congress has never, since the end of World War II, re-established the controls over earth and peace that the Constitution gave it. This condition is largely the fault of Congress itself, because it has created institutions . . .